

The
Lowell
P e a r l

A publication of the University of Lowell
Literary Society

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Introduction

The University of Lowell has always encouraged creative thinking, but now, as local poet Paul Marion recently pointed out, we are undergoing a renaissance: a literary renaissance. This is evidenced by the University's commitment to the Summer Writing Program, its reading series, and the writing conferences. These programs, along with the school's English department, are fostering an atmosphere where creativity flourishes.

Since the University is committed to creativity, it is the belief of many that a forum is needed in which to spotlight the work of the authors. *The Lowell Pearl* is a new journal dedicated to publishing quality literature.

Quality literature reveals truths. It lets the reader learn what the author discovered through her writing. And it is my belief that it is this pursuit of truths that drives writers to their art. In his book, *Obligations*, Michael Walzer says that if writers "lie or conceal what they know... they are breaking faith." The literature in this first issue of our journal discloses the truths these writers know.

Writers want to share their work with others. This idea is espoused in a quote brought to me by Rita Rouvalis. It neatly sums up how many writers feel about their work:

[so it] "... is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I
sent it." (Isaiah 55:11 NIV)

I would like to thank Karen Propp and Rebecca Dakin-Rose for all of their assistance and support. And, naturally, the English department and the Literary Society. We hope *The Lowell Pearl* will become an integral part of the community.

Judith Dickerman-Nelson

The Lowell Review is a bi-annual publication of the University of Lowell Literary Society.

Poetry and short stories should be sent to

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South Campus Student Information Center
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One University Avenue
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All submissions must be typed. Please enclose a SASE or University box number. Please do not send originals, as no submissions will be returned.

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A. C. Arnold

The Best of all Talking

Young male bears are often seen
 in cities during breeding season...
 the bear population has been on an
 upswing since the early 1900s as
 more... farmland was abandoned
 and reverted to woods.

Nashua Telegraph

I.

We citizens smelled the bear and relinquished
 our streets. We closed shades, guarded slits
 of curtain space and doors ajar; we hugged
 the sweat of our palms with our faces.
 The town became an impenetrable forest
 of caves and deer beds sprinkled with eyeballs
 like a starlit sky. The town madman said,
 "the best of all talking is of the wilderness
 and this bear comes to reclaim lost land."
 Someone gave him a drink and he quieted.

II.

The bear swaggered in, bellowing for a mate.
 We swore it was an omen and prayed for
 our hunter's forbearance; our teeth chattered
 against bones of long-dead pioneers, settlers
 and fish, chattered like an undertaker's fast
 hammering of pine boxes. But one child escaped
 our watch and approached the beast in the open
 moonlight, curious and unafraid; he pet the thick
 fur, playfully pulled an ear and was eaten -
 a smile on the boy's face, head swallowed
 into the red throat and pull of the tongue.

III.

We citizens, in due time, emerged from our
 havens; we catcalled and berated the dissipating
 stench. The mother of the child taken by
 the bear was inconsolable. The talk of the
 heroic deeds we could have performed for him
 was endless; the fear in our pupils endless, too.

A. C. Arnold

Cowboy Lines

Rule one: all rules of sageness won't keep.
 The outhouse mirror never lies.
 The barroom mirror always lies.
 The earth has holes for gophers, mines, worms.
 The sky has day and night, Time, stars
 and holes for twangy banjo tunes.
 All "yee-ha" men are not expected
 to bathe daily while out on the trail. Fall
 is late, the colors feign to red
 but all is blue in Wichita:
 the cowboys have all gone home,
 home to cook and barbecue on ranges.
 Their antelope and mustangs neigh and buck
 into the desert vacuum of the west.

Karen Propp

Crossing Nevada

The voices of Stevens, Lowell, Marianne Moore spoke from the stereo tapedeck, narrating miles of inexplicable sierra against the horizon line.

A swatch of blue-white matter across the night mocked the modern designs on a fitted sheet, allowing me to say, "I want to sleep on that sky, to doze in feathers of ever-cumulous space."

Everything was word or sight or gamble in the land of neon casinos, whirring slots where someone dreamt a ladies room decor: the walls were carpeted red and papered pink. The road cut through the dark and took its time passing the sight of an all-night high-tech gold mine.

The moonlight showed me, calmly, what was mine traveling there, returning here: a time, a place. The mirror reflected a floral pink so soon, when before it had been a last decor. I was feeling lucky; the silver slot machine's fruit lined up in a quarter's gamble.

The road signs home, the digital clock marked space and time's confluence at 1(:)11: the sky revealed nothing but its metaphysical sheet, an inky blue-gray vertical divide in the night.

At X miles per hour I heard my lines take shape before the sleeping mountainous miles. One word problem solved, then. There would be more.

Peggy Rambach**Making Shapes**

The sandcastle was shaped like a fortress: squat towers at four corners joined by a wall that, at its top, was cut into square teeth. Though I was still at a distance, I could see it clearly. I turned to my daughter and said, "Look at the castle."

It was Monday afternoon. The yellow sun leaned toward the dunes. The ocean was grey-green and, at lowtide, far out from shore. The wind came from it taking salt and coolness, brushing back the hair from my cheeks.

I stepped through cigarette filters left high on the beach in soft, hot sand. I felt them with my bare feet. They were as hard as plastic. They smelled heated and dirty, and they moved with the sand my foot displaced, impossible to crush.

I stepped over the dried eel grass and leathered kelp that divided the length of the beach in a line the shape of the tide's edge. Past the seaweed, the sands felt washed by ocean water, dried by the sun. It slid through my toes.

I stopped to wait for Leigh and looked out to the water and up to the sky. I longed to drop the bulky canvas bag, my purse, the sandals, their straps hooked over my middle and forefinger. The bag was heavy. The edge of Leigh's pail pressed through the canvas and into my leg. I wondered if it would leave a bruise.

Leigh walked looking down at her feet. I could feel her trying not to complain. She looked up and saw that I had stopped. She stopped too.

"Carry me," she said.

"Just a little farther. See?" I pointed to the castle.

Beyond it, down on the flat, wet sand, I saw a man and a little boy. The man stood with his hands on his hips, his back toward me, watching the little boy run in circles, splashing in puddles the tide left behind. Farther down the beach, five seagulls stood in a staggered row, facing the wind that blew in from the southeast. Their black shadows swung out toward the surf. They stood still and alert, as if they scented the breeze and listened.

The boy ran while the man watched. Then suddenly the man ran too and chased the little boy. The boy's squeals, his high laughter, floated to me.

"And there's someone for you to play with."

"Carry me." Leigh bent and straightened her knees, did it again. Soon, I knew, she would fall down, go limp and cry. I walked back to her and swung the bag onto my left shoulder. "It's hard with all this," I said and lifted her.

I took from the bag two green bath towels, and spread them next to the castle, then Leigh's yellow metal dump truck, placing it on the sand at her feet. I took out her blue pail and orange shovel, handed them to her and couldn't figure out why the bag had felt so heavy, but lately everything seemed to be more than it was.

Leigh held her pail and shovel and stared at the castle.

"Can I break it?" she said.

I smiled and took from the bottom of the bag an oily bottle of sunscreen. "No." I said. I placed my hands on her shoulders, turned her to face me, and kneeling, unscrewed the top of the bottle. It scraped and crackled on sand caught in the grooves.

Leigh turned her face away.

"Just a little," I said.

The boy was on the man's shoulders now. The man reached up to his ribs and tickled him, then held him under his arms and flipped him over his head, landing him gently on his feet. The boy jumped up and down. I heard him say, "Again. Again."

I rubbed the white lotion into Leigh's soft cheek. Leigh's eyes were closed and I saw the crescent sweep of her gold-red lashes.

The man lifted the boy onto his shoulders, then flipped him over and down with the same smooth ease.

I squeezed more lotion onto the tips of my fingers and lifted them to Leigh's other cheek. I decided that the man was not the boy's father. When they played the man held back. He was too careful and I had not heard him laugh. He hadn't the exuberance, the abandon I'd seen in my husband, felt in myself when Leigh ran gleefully from our threat of relentless tickling. He was too attentive, as if the accidental bump or scrape and the temporary wails that followed would be much more than that, would be unbearable.

"Let's build a castle too." I put away the lotion and moved the towels, wiping my fingers on them at the same time. "Next to this one."

"I can use my shobel," Leigh said, not yet ready for V's. She sat down and began, and I could see that there was nothing in Leigh's world at that moment but the sand, and the shovel, and the strength and coordination it took her to scoop, lift and tilt.

I pushed the sand with my palms and made with Leigh one large mound. It took very little time. I sat back on my heels and laid my hands on my thighs. I tried to remember if there was anything else.

The man and the little boy walked past us, toward their towels and beachbag.

I looked up, squinting, smiled and nodded and said, "Did

you make this?"

"Yes," he said and stopped. He'd swept his hair back from his forehead by pushing his fingers through it like a comb, the grooves they'd made still there, his hair ropey and dark from half-dried saltwater. He wore khaki shorts that fell just below his navel and cut tightly across the flesh at his hips.

"It must have taken a long time," I said.

"Not really. Look." He walked quickly up to his towel and gathered what looked to me like toys. Leigh and the little boy stared at each other. The man walked back and dropped before me a red plastic mold shaped like two of the towers, a blue mold shaped like the other two towers, and a yellow mold shaped like the wall. "Easy," he said.

I laughed, feeling foolish. I had thought the castle extraordinary and it had been made with a toy.

"Where'd you get those?"

"They got them for him. Christmas or something."

I heard him force care from his voice and I knew he did not live with the boy and that the boy was his son.

He knelt and began to fill the yellow mold. "Come on, Jonathan." The boy squatted next to him.

Leigh and I filled the red mold, first Leigh's hands, then mine, and then we bumped hands and spilled sand and Leigh laughed and did it again for the fun of it.

When the mold was full, I patted the sand with my palm, turned the mold over on top of the mound we'd made before, and with both hands, lifted it, sliding it with ease from the sand inside. For a moment the tower stood complete, then half gave way, slid and became part of the mound beneath.

"Try again," the man said, smiling.

I dug to wetter sand and Leigh lost interest. She got up and ran in a circle around us, ran faster, leaning toward us until her feet slipped from beneath her and she fell and rolled, flopping her

arms and coming to rest on her back. Then she jumped up and did it again, giggling at her own silliness. The little boy, Jonathan, watched with a loose, open-mouthed smile, then joined her.

The children giggled and fell and ran around us while the man and I worked on the castle. I glanced at him. He lifted the yellow mold from the sand with sureness, his other hand waiting to fill it again; like a craftsman who knows and loves his work, he did not waste a movement.

The wet sand was cool and less fine than the dryer surface sand. It scraped the tips of my fingers. I packed it into the mold with the heel of my palm, then over-turned the mold without hesitating, the way my husband had taught me to turn an egg. I gripped the mold and lifted, but it wouldn't budge. I squeezed and tapped, then pulled with even strength until slowly the mold separated from the sand within, letting go with reluctance, then all at once. Now the tower's scalloped edge and conical roof were solid and defined.

"There you go," he said.

I looked up. I'd nearly forgotten him. His face was truly pleased, and I felt the shy pride that comes from unexpected, unsought, acknowledgement.

Behind him, I saw Leigh spread her arms, lift her face, close her eyes and spin, then stagger and laugh, stick out her tongue, still laughing through her nose, fall down on purpose, get up and do it all over again. Her arms were coral white in the sun. The muscles of her thighs rose smooth and her copper-colored hair swung across her back.

The little boy spun and fell and laughed too. His thin curved lips were orangey-pink and dark against his pale skin.

The man and I continued to build. We built walls and tunnels beneath them, bridges joining towers and moats beneath the bridges. The castle city spread between us, while the children ran around and around and then down into the tide pools.

Without them near, it was suddenly quiet and I stopped, looked up at the man, at the castles and to where the children played. I laughed. I put down the blue mold I'd just filled and laughed and said, "Look at us."

He stood and I sat at the edge of the final slope of the beach. We looked down at our children who poured buckets of water and sand on each other's feet. We had introduced ourselves and now we said nothing. I felt we were both deciding whether we wanted to change the afternoon from the solitude we'd imagined, and commit ourselves to the effort of talking with a stranger. But because we were strangers and because we were on an empty beach in the late afternoon, the silence became intimate and I felt myself forced to speak.

"Do you have a summer house here?"

"I drive up from Lowell."

"They're doing some good renovation there."

"I guess."

"Haverhill tore everything down. That's where I live. And built shopping centers and parking lots. It could have been beautiful. Now it's gone."

"People are stupid," he said and sat down.

I picked up fistfuls of sand and let the sand run out through the spaces between my fingers. I noticed that he did the same and that we both looked from our hands, to the children, to the sea.

"How old is she?" he said.

"Just three. Last month."

I waited, then asked, "How old is he?"

"Three next month."

"It's a complicated age," I said.

"They're funny," he said, "Full of surprises."

I looked at the sand which stretched below us to the surf. The water in the miniature branched rivers and gorges the tide created had stopped flowing out.

"Are you on vacation?" I asked.

"No, no," he said.

"It's just rare seeing a man on the beach on a Monday. That's why."

"I work nights at Raytheon. Eleven to seven shift."

I imagined him standing on an assembly line in a large, brightly lit room with blackened windows, the room and the man existing in a time that had nothing to do with the sun and the turn of the earth.

"It must be good to have your days to be with your little boy."

"When she lets me."

I paused, surprised he'd allowed me to know this. "I don't understand why some women make it so hard."

"Hate," he said and laughed.

The sand ran through my fingers. I watched it and felt it and wondered why it was such a pleasure, a comfort, just to let sand run through fingers. I felt the heat of the sun on my back and knew I was burning. I spread my hair across it as a lazy protection. I leaned on my elbows and looked at the sea and the children between my raised knees.

The children were sitting in a tide pool slapping the water between their thighs.

"I like to watch Leigh play with other kids," I said.

"I know what you mean," he said. "It's like suddenly they're people out there in the world."

"Yes," I said and watched my daughter. I watched her and I felt my love rise. I felt it squeeze my lungs and stomach and heart. For a moment it was a physical pain.

After a while I said, "Do you remember how when they're born their eyes are so clear?"

"Yes," he said.

"Like glass. Like shined glass."

The man and I packed away each toy, shook sand from our towels and folded them. We brushed sand from our legs and arms, then stood and watched the children jump on the castles. The sun was low and orange and the wind had turned cold. The seagulls had moved closer and were just ahead of the tide. The man and I lifted out bags. Then he called to his son and they walked up toward an opening in the dunes.

I turned to Leigh and said it was time to go home.

She was squatting, her back to me, drawing with a finger in the sand. "I don't want to," she said.

"Aren't you cold?"

"I'm not cold," she said.

"Well, I'm going," I said and walked away from her. After six steps I looked back. Slowly, she followed.

Edward Ross Maguire**Wayward Children**

Green pines;
 weighed heavily by
 innocent snow,
 as parents by children.
 Should limbs break,
 so goes snow's chastity,
 and so the children drift,
 wayward as windblown snow.

Marco J. D'Amico**Being in a Poetry Workshop for the First Time**

These tangled lines
 cascade off this rocky cliff,
 plummet into untried waters
 filled with man-eating sharks.
 A haggard fisherman
 catches them in his net,
 careful to save
 the best ones
 for himself.
 He smiles as he sails
 into the most perfectly
 perfect sunset.

Gregoire Turgeon**Roses For Evan**

The roses I grew up with
 we took for granted.
 By the driveway, its noisy grit,
 station wagons pruned whole canes.
 Rust on a flimsy wire fence
 stained buds, rubbed deep.
 By the narrow walk to the back porch door
 every winter we piled snow, chunks of ice,
 the whole season on them.
 But they grew, *flourished*,
 a word whose luxury they taught me.
 We had movies: me, at ten,
 squinting in grainy sunlight,
 holding a ruler to prove the size
 of a creamy six inch rose.
 One purple climber outgrew the trellis
 by ten feet, spread out
 and held on, somehow, at bedroom height.
 So I want them, every color,
 rocking in breezes, weighted with scent,
 here now at this house we've built,
 the last house we'll ever own, we say,
 laughing but full of hope.
 I work with my son, five years old,
 tall now as the shovel and full of help.
 We dig and plant, sprinkle rose food
 green as all nutritious things should be—

pretty grains, like little jewels.
 My small pirate's treasure to bury:
 Now let's draw a map.

I know the rest. Much water;
 proper feedings every six weeks;
 courageous pruning and willingness to fight
 beetles, aphids, mold and blight,
 all pestilence drawn to beauty too.
 I will give these roses all the care

they never had years ago
 in a yard now paved, near a house
 worth less than empty space to someone.
 I will go back, and watch:
 Not all memories of beauty are lies.
 The proof will flourish.
 My son will know why.

Gregoire Turgeon

September Roses

Their name never means more: *Summer Sunshine*.
Seasons fold over each other,
and these roses glow, pure yellow,

against our lawn's ripening green,
while leaves curl, and trees start shrugging,

and some days smell of weather we recognize
in changed wind, weather ready to settle.

But rosebuds go on swelling til they crack,
then push more,
spreading small dawns,
signaling in moonlight, too.

I've learned just when to cut them, bring them
for the milk glass vase—
for the kitchen table where supper dishes
now leak shadows as we talk,
and roses smell of humid light, heated shade.

* * *

I've pressed one in a book, for later,
the perfect petals of its name

one day telling you about this morning

when this yellow rose leaned,
cupping yesterday's rain,
glassy drops extravagant and poised.

Early leaves flew from all trees toward closing.
This rose blossomed just the same.
I wanted it someday for you.

Srinath Kalluri

Mira

Jayesh walks slowly down the narrow street. Dry and powdery dust hangs a few feet over the narrow road and covers everything in a thin and dirty film. The dust gets under his collar and mixes with the sticky sweat around his neck. He shakes out the shirt to let in some air and wants to take it off, but the hum of a mosquito as it buzzes by his ear makes him change his mind. He passes small thatched roof houses separated only by narrow, open sewer drains, the black water in the drains stagnant and humming with the sound of flies. He watches the people coming out of their houses with their families, to the shaded veranda to enjoy the evening coolness. A group of small naked children run by him screaming and laughing, their thin brown bodies covered with dust. He watches them till they disappear behind the brick building of the co-operative store. He now walks quickly, till he comes to the edge of the village where he turns right and sets out across the paddy fields. The rice plants have just been transplanted and the shoots are still only knee high. The muddy water of the fields comes up to his ankles and the water feels slimy and cool to his burning feet. He finds the coolness relieving but after a few minutes begins to find the mud irritating, so he walks on the embankments zig-zagging between fields till he nears the irrigation ditches. The water in the ditches is very low, so he walks across slowly, being careful not to slip on the slick surface. He sniffs at the heavy, late summer air, and looks up at the cloudy and sullen sky. The monsoon's not far off. He'll have

to buy a new mosquito net; early monsoons after blistering summers always attracted an unusually large host of insects.

His house sits six fields from the ditches and is surrounded by his small vegetable farm. There is no other house in sight, except for the domed roof of his neighbor's shack which he can barely make out, since it is half a mile down the road. He crosses the unpaved road that serves as a bullock cart trail between Patna and the village, walking slowly across the long, dry grass till he reaches the barbed wire fence surrounding the house. He likes the swish the grass makes as it brushes against his thighs. He pushes the bottommost wire of the fence up and crawls under, keeping away from the iron spikes. He feels the grit under the fence bite into his knees, so he gets up quickly and when he slaps his khaki pants the dust mushrooms out like a small cloud. He circles around the front of the house and enters the courtyard through the water stained wooden door. He washes both feet thoroughly with the cool water from the narrow well in the courtyard's center. He drops the bucket back into the well, watching the yellow jute rope snake down with it. He waits for the thunk of the bucket hitting water, and then ties the rope to the wooden crossbar running across the well. They were going to need that rain. *He* was going to need that rain. He checks his feet for traces of mud; Mira, his sister, hates his cutting across fields and walking into the house on muddy feet. He stands near the well for a few minutes slowly drying his feet with Mira's soft cotton sari. He doesn't feel like going into the house yet. He folds the sari carefully, and hangs it on the clothes line, as close to its original place as he can remember.

As he nears the kitchen, he hears the metallic notes of the portable cassette player and Mira's soft voice trying to keep up with the tune. "Moh'md Rafi", he thinks, recognizing the singer. Mira loves the voice of Rafi. He sings along softly, as much as he can, but cannot keep up with either Mira or the voice. *I should*

have sent her to a music teacher, he thinks. He enters the kitchen and finds nobody there, but he smells the oily tang of 'pakodies' Mira must have fried during the afternoon. He pops one of the darker fried pieces into his mouth and chews on it slowly, enjoying the hot and spicy taste at the back of his throat. He was going to miss these 'pakodies'; he could never learn to make them as well as Mira. He looks around the kitchen. It looks new in its bareness. Everything has been put away, even the sugar Mira always left out on the counter beside the stove. The stove looks clean; he can see patches of the red paint on the sides. He looks around for something familiar and finds Mira's 'apron', an old full-shirt of his with the long arms knotted at the cuffs, and is glad it is there, as it always is.

The door to the kitchen squeaks open and Mira comes in, her dark hair in a blue cotton towel. "Hey Mira! Are you done with your bath?" he asks.

She has her long hair over her shoulder and is rubbing it briskly between the towel. "Yes..., but there is no more hot water for you," she says, eyeing his clothes critically, but offering none of the usual comments about his appearance after walking through the fields.

"That's fine, I will heat some up on the stove right now," he says. He notices her clothes, an old and faded cotton sari and an older petticoat. "Why aren't you wearing the new churidar I bought? You know, the green one."

"I haven't changed yet." She is fidgety and isn't in a talkative mood, so he goes outside to get some water from the well and puts it on the stove. He pokes at the charcoal for a few minutes and enters the house through the kitchen. There is no one in the kitchen; Mira must be changing in her room. He knocks at the door connecting Mira's room to the kitchen and walks in when there is no response.

The room is bare. He finds the wooden cot propped up against

the wall, on its side, the legs sticking out into the room. The bedsheets are rolled up into a tight bundle and placed beside the bed. The only other objects in the room are a couple of suitcases and a small bag, neatly arranged against a wall. The room looks funny, big and lifeless since all the articles he identifies with the room have been removed. He picks up the larger suitcase and makes towards the door leading into the main room where he notices the address label peeling off. He puts the suitcase on the floor and presses the label back on the case. He reads Mira's neat handwriting on the label— 'Mira Pathak'. He can see the beginnings of a different word after 'Mira,' crossed out, and the 'Pathak' printed very neatly in its place, as if it was painted. It hits him then, a funny feeling he can't identify, like he used to feel on the big swing in the courtyard, hanging still for a moment, as if his heart..., as if time itself had stopped, before the swing reversed direction and hurtled back to the other end of its arc. He leaves the suitcase on the floor and goes into the front room. Mira is standing before the long mirror, arranging the frosty green 'chunni' of her pink and green 'churidar' around her shoulders. He stands on the doorstep watching her. She smears some black 'kaajal' on her index finger, rolls her eyes skywards and carefully applies the paste to her eyelashes.

"You look good, Mira." She moves away from the mirror and looks at him from under her dark eyelashes, but she says nothing. A small breeze makes the jute window shades rustle softly. He hears the frogs croaking hoarsely outside as evening turns to night. He hears the comb in Mira's hand buzz when she runs it over her fingernail. "You know how we were trying to guess if Harish's cow was stolen or just lost, and if I remember you thought it was lost..., well we were both wrong, it got hit by a bus..." He feels stupid trying to carry the conversation, so he stops.

"Poor Harish," she says. She is done combing her hair.

"Yeah, poor Harish," he says quietly, almost to himself. He cannot think of any other news, so he watches her separate her hair into three braids and start to knot them into a pony tail. The crickets have started chirping outside. The breeze gets stronger, and he can hear small bells hung across the front door ring a few times. "Let me do it," he says, walking up to her. "I can pull it tighter."

He can see the surprise on her face when she turns around. He used to braid her hair when she was very small, and they lived with a distant relative, but she had soon got the hang of it and could do it herself. He starts to twist two of the braids, trying to imitate the pattern Mira has started. He can feel the silky hair slide in his hands. He digs his fingers in the hair and lets the strands get in between them. He slides the fingers down to undo any knots in the hair. He makes a fist and tugs lightly. The hair feels good to grip, for it fills his hand.

"Tight enough?" he asks.

"Yes," she says. "Are you sure you can manage?"

"Of course I can, I used to do this when you were a kid you know, and what a great job I would do too, but you have probably forgotten all that," he says, biting his lower lip in concentration.

"I have not, not all of us have lousy memories like you," she says laughing and pulling her hair away from his. "You have done it all wrong, you got the braids mixed up here." She hands the hair back to him and bends her head towards the light. He smiles at her and starts to undo the wrong braids.

"Hey Mira I...," he starts, but is interrupted by a loud knock on the door. They both look at the door and at each other and then Mira scurries off, the 'paayal' on her feet jingling musically after her. He sits still, watching her disappear into the kitchen. The knock on the door becomes more insistent, and Jayesh gets up slowly from the floor, his feet aching from the long walk home.

Eva Saether

Beyond the Harbor

Far below the railing, the black waters of the Atlantic Ocean splashed against the ocean liner, the MSS Sagafjord, on its voyage to Norway. Goose bumps rose on my arms as the cool salty air brushed over me. Although I was only two the last time I had been aboard this ship, smells and sights awakened in me vague memories. I rested my head on the cool rail, letting the sound of the lapping waves, the rocking of the ship, lull me.

Echoing in my head were Mom's words, "You are a teenager now." Five months ago I had turned thirteen, and on that momentous occasion Mom gave me a pep talk.

She walked into the room that I shared with my little sister. I was busy at my favorite pastime, writing a story called *The Day I Fell Down the Drain*, when I looked up into her cool grey-green eyes. Basically, Mom's an okay mom. The kind you like to make mushy cards for. But she brought us up on Dr. Spock's book about how to raise kids and I mostly blamed him when she came up with speeches like the one she was about to give me. I put down my pencil.

"It simply means that you have to start behaving more responsibly," she said at the end of the speech, folding her arms. "From now on you chores must be done before leaving the house and I'd like you to start helping with your sister. I want to see you acting older because you're not a child anymore. You are a teenager now.

"And stop cracking that gum," she warned, just as I snapped down on it. She turned and left the room. I looked at the page in

front of me. My idea about falling down the bathtub drain and having adventures with frogs suddenly seemed silly. I put the story away.

Lifting my head from the rail, I let go a deep sigh. The night air had cooled rapidly. Not wanting to go back to our cabin just yet, I found a lounge chair with a small pillow and grey blanket. I snuggled down into the folds of the coarse blanket relishing the fact that Mom had given me complete freedom while we were on ship. My head sunk down into the pillow and my thoughts drifted back to a sunny day three months after my birthday.

Having run all the way home from school, I pounded into the hallway and was about to leap up the stairs when Mom confronted me.

"Why are you out of breath?" she asked, arms akimbo. Before I could answer, she continued. "And why are you all sweaty, you had better start wearing deodorant." She turned on her heels, headed for the kitchen with the parting remark, "Just remember, if your mother doesn't tell you about these things, your best friend certainly won't."

This happened on a Friday. I thought that I had to get ahead of Mom. Her hounding about very personal matters was driving me crazy. My best friend, Anita, was always full of good advice. I gave her a call.

She picked up the phone on the first ring. "Anita, hi, I'm glad you're in, cuz I need your help. Want to go pick out some deodorant with me?" She was all for the idea. "Okay, well where should we go?" She suggested downtown. "Okay, sounds good. Do you remember the way?" She did. "Yeah, ah, I remember now. A bus ride and a few stops on the train. Okay, swell, see ya tomorrow?" She thought Saturday morning would be fine. "Oh, Anita, see ya for breakfast...your house?"

The next morning on the train, Anita asked me to give her my

wallet. "I just thought it'd be a good idea," she said, putting it into her purse. "Remember how you lost all our money at the fair last week?"

I did remember. Fortunately, her parents were with us and the wallet turned up, money intact, at the lost and found booth. I sat back in my seat and relaxed, anticipating the fun we'd have today.

Anita decided that I needed a small bottle of cheap perfume to wear along with the recommended deodorant. Heading into our favorite department store, we stopped first at the perfume counters. The smell was overwhelming and my allergies made me sneeze. To have some fun, I continued sneezing after the real ones stopped. Usually I could start people laughing because my fake sneezes sounded so genuine, but Anita knew better and demanded that I stop. The madder she became, the louder I sneezed, until people were turning their heads to stare at us.

Anita threw down the maroon silk scarf she was looking at. "Are you going to stop it?" she said, hissing at me. The light in the store flashed on her cat-framed glasses as she swung around to glare at me. I gave her one final sneeze. "That's it. You go find your stupid deodorant without me."

I laughed at her receding back as she stormed out the east exit. Then I hurried up and left by the south door, hoping that we'd meet somewhere on the street corner. Pushing a path through the milling crowd, I raced to the corner. I peered down the street, looking from one side to the other, but she was nowhere in sight. Since she had all the money, I had been counting on her to try to find me. Frantically, I ran back into the store, feeling so sure that I'd suddenly see the flash of her glasses. But she had vanished. For the next fifteen minutes I milled around the smelly perfume counters, then walked out to the street.

Mom's rule #1 was to always put a dime in your shoe for a phone call whenever leaving the house on an excursion. I ebbled along with the crowd, head down low. I wondered how long it

would take me to walk the twenty-five miles home. Debating the idea of panhandlinng, I searched the blank faces bobbing past me. What if I asked the wrong person, someone who could take advantage of me? I started running, jostling and annoying people as I charged past them. Not even a dime in my shoe, how would I ever explain this one?

I turned down a side street, partly to get away from the masses of people and partly to gather up what was left of my wits. And then I saw my chance, my one hope, a blue uniform. The policeman was hunched over scribbling down a licence number on a pad. Calmly now, I waited until he put the ticket on the windshield. He began moving down to the next car. I patted my braids into place and cleared my throat. The policeman turned. I smiled.

"I'm in a bit of trouble, sir." I said. There, it was out. He waited for me to go on. "I wonder if I could bother you for a dime?"

He walked over and peered down at me. "What kind of trouble are you in?" He said, pushing back his hat.

"Well, I was separated...ah in the store. I mean, I lost my friend and well...ah," I paused, wondering how the next part of my story would come across. "Well... she was carrying all of our money and...I tried to find her but she's gone and I think by now that she's on her way home. So, if you could lend me a dime, I'll call for someone to come pick me up."

The policeman bent his head back and chuckled softly. He patted my shoulder, and to my horror, said that he could do better than give me a dime, he would drive me right to my door. During the ride, Officer White asked me dozens of questions but I never remembered one word of that conversation. I could not stop imagining what was about to happen to me when I showed up at Mom's door in a marked cruiser.

Following my directions, Officer White turned up Main Street.

Looking out from my front seat, my heart suddenly lurched. Heading up to my street was Anita with her father. I tried to slip to the floor through the seat belt. But she spotted me as we drove past and pointed excitedly, tugging at her father's sweater. He turned and our eyes met, mine only a half inch above the edge of the side window. Officer White asked if I was all right and in a small voice I assured him that I was.

Nearly all the neighbors were sitting on their front stoops, enjoying the balmy spring day. Kindly, Officer White asked if I would like to be let out at the corner, but it was too late, all eyes were on us. "No, that's fine thanks," I said. I may as well die quickly. "Umm, see that lady working with the rake? You can drop me there. That's my mom." As I stepped out of the car I could see Anita and her father racing toward me. What I will never forget about that moment was looking over the police car and seeing Mom's face, the rake motionless in her hands.

I twitched uncomfortable beneath the blanket. A couple holding hands strolled slowly past my chair. They paused and looked out over the rail at the large, yellow moon. As still as the night air, I laid low peeking just above the edge of my blanket. Breathlessly, I watched them move together, becoming one dark form against the moonlight. Their quiet cooing reached my ears like the soft murmur of Grandma's gently voice telling stories about the "old days."

To gain Mom's favor, I began taking my little sister in tow every Saturday to visit Grandma. She lived across town in an antiseptic nursing home, a place I found depressing. As I tugged little sister down the long tunnel to Grandma's room, our footsteps echoing, I vowed each time never to grow old.

The small dim room reeked of ammonia and had walls stained in putrid green. On the grey concrete floor a faded throw rug warmed a single spot next to her bed. A crumpled postcard size

portrait of Jesus had been taped crookedly above a rickety tin bureau. Inside the bureau there was always a fresh box of chocolate mints that Uncle Tom restocked every Sunday. Sister and I would sit on the bed eating these while Grandma quietly went over the same stories she had told us the week before.

One afternoon she broke off her recitation and said, "You girls aren't listening to me." Her tiny wrinkled face turned, small, bright blue eyes trapping mine. She shook her head. "You haven't heard one word. What do you care about an old lady's feelings? You're young. I think you just come here to eat my candies."

Little sister and I instantly stopped munching to stare at each other in astonishment. I was positive that little sister's chocolate guilt-smeared face was a mirror reflection of my own. Appalled, I looked at my Grandma's face, the melting chocolate mint forgotten in my hand. "I'm sorry Grandma," I said. "I'd really like it if you'd tell us that story about Mom; the one where she got the clothes peg stuck on her nose."

For a second, Grandma's face floated over the moon's and stared down at me. The couple sighed, looked at the moon again, and Grandma's face faded. Wrapping their arms around each other, they walked away. I let out my breath. It was probably time to turn in, but I felt happy under the blanket with the smell of the ocean all around me.

Through the quiet air, I heard my name whispered. I sat up, peering down the dark deck. A shape moved toward me. "Mom?" I said softly. Walking out of the dark shadows into the moonlight, Mom appeared before me.

"There you are," she said, sitting in the chair next to mine. She stared out at the moon, then turned to me. "I just wanted to let you know that I was going to bed. You can stay up a bit, if you like."

"Yeah...it's kinda neat out here at night. You can't really hear anything but the water. I think I'll sit for a little more."

"Okay, that's fine, but not too late. If you're not tired tomorrow night, you might want to stay up and watch the movie that's going to be shown."

"Oh yeah...well that'd be neat. What kinda movie is it?"

"Something called, 'In the Heat of the Night.' It's an adult movie, I think...well, I guess it would be...but..."

I always worried when Mom hung up her sentences with "buts," so I finished for her. "But you think I can go to it?"

"Well sure, we're on vacation. In fact, let's not worry about going to church tomorrow. We can sleep in for a change."

I smiled, knowing that Mom seldom went to church. Her idea about sleeping in sounded swell. Maybe I would miss church.

"Okay Mom, I'll head in soon. I'd really like to stay awake for that movie tomorrow. So, see you in a while?"

"Okay, good-night...oh, and remember to be quiet when you go to bed." She walked away softly.

Dinner time was always an ordeal in our house. Mom never relaxed and she never sat down. There were eight of us, including Dad who never said much. In turn, Mom yelled at each of us. Lately, everything she said struck me as funny. Little sister knew that these days it didn't take much to set me off. She'd crinkle up her nose and make funny faces behind Mom's back. Dad would scowl for her to stop and I'd giggle. Mom would admonish me, "Stop giggling. Nothing's funny when you giggle, so stop it." She'd turn away and little sister would make another face, holding her belly and laughing silently. And the giggles would sputter out until I completely lost control.

Shortly before we began this trip, I worried that maybe something was very wrong with me. These episodes of hysterical giggling were happening more often. They were happening even

when nothing was funny.

I'd had time adjusting to church after leaving behind the Sunday school classroom. One Sunday, I was sitting alone in my favorite pew, far back in the murky depths behind the rest of the parish. I was having noisy thoughts about how I would spend the rest of the day when everything suddenly went quiet. My thoughts became still. I stared ahead into the dim solitude and realized that I had missed a cue from the minister. People were kneeling, their heads bent, silently moving their lips. I began to move onto my knees but the nails in my seat protested with a loud squeal. Scrunching back, I tried to sit still. Without knowing what was going on, I began to feel very strange.

Through the dimness I could see motley hats, disembodied from their owners, bobbing in diffused sunbeams. I felt like the only real being in that church and I giggled. No heads turned to stare at me. The lips did not stop moving, the hats continued their eerie dancing, and in that solemn moment, I giggled again.

Several more giggles bubbled out of me. Aghast, I threw my hand over my mouth. As successive waves of giggles rocked my body, the seat squeaked loudly.

Through the sounds of my choking and gasping, the minister's voice boomed, "The young lady in the back seems to need reminding that she is in the house of our Lord."

I sat up abruptly and gulped down any further giggles. While I wiped dry my eyes, the congregation turned to waggle their heads. Outside the sun had brightened and everything in the church seemed real again. In the spot light, I hunched back into the pew and stared up at the painted arches.

I started when the minister boomed again, "If, young lady, you cannot control yourself and be quiet, then I strongly urge you to leave so that the rest of us may continue in peace to commune with God." Abashed, my cheeks aflame, I slouched down in the pew and found solace in the darkness.

Snuggling down deeper into the coarse grey blanket, I thought about what followed that scene in the church. At the end of the service, the minister stood at the chapel doors to greet each parish member. I waited in the line, my cheeks still flushed. When my turn came, I went up to him and wordlessly shook his hand while everyone stared. Heading out into the sunlight, I felt a little better. But I muttered all the way home, thinking that only crazy girls giggled in church.

As I became convinced that I was really going mad, I overheard Mom talking to my older sister. "I don't know what to do with her. I can't remember having these problems with you or Nina." Sweat beaded on my forehead as I listened behind the opened door. "I'll have to do something. It's not too late to make arrangements for the summer."

Frightened that Mom intended to send me away to wherever it was that they sent crazy girls, I put on my best behavior. I was very careful not to do anything that would set her off. For many days, I worried that Mom really would put me away somewhere.

One evening, during the last week of school, Mom quietly came into my room. As she pulled up a chair, I put down my pencil and slid a book over my paper.

"Is your teacher still giving you homework?" She sat down beside me.

"Ah no...I'm just fooling around," I said, pushing the paper into a corner on the desk.

Her eyes followed the covered sheet. "So, what's that? One of your stories...the one where you grow small and play with frogs?"

"No, it's a different one." Mom's hand started reaching for the sheet. "No, really Mon...it's nothing." She drew her hand back, staring at me. "It's...ah, just a story Grandma told me last week."

"Oh," she said, settling in her chair. "Oh, I see...well, I wanted us to have a little talk."

"Gee...what about?" I said, suddenly worried.

"Well, about the way you've been acting lately. You don't seem like yourself, like there's something bothering you."

"Oh no," I said, shutting my eyes halfway, keeping her in sight. "No...really...everything's okay...really."

"Well, we don't get much time to talk about things." She smiled, placing her hand over my arm. I squeezed my eyes shut. "And I've been thinking, maybe at this time, we need to talk more."

My eyes flew open. "What...?"

"I just thought, you and I should have some time together...alone."

"Together...alone?"

Mom moved her head, looking around the room. "I remember how you felt about your older sisters, taking a trip on the boat to Norway by themselves."

Yeah, I'd never forget how lucky they had been, or all the stories they came home with. What was mom up to? Alone...together...

"I thought it'd be good if you and I took a trip together. I'd like you to see your relatives now, instead of waiting until you're sixteen."

"Gee Mom, no kidding?"

I can't remember ever being so excited as I was that day Mom told me about the trip. I didn't even worry about spending a whole month alone with her. I forgot about being crazy. I even forgot about giggling. It seemed to take ages for the day to arrive when we finally climbed on the bus and headed for New York. We stayed one night there, and the next morning took a cab to the harbor. I'll never forget it.

Following Mom down a long red-carpeted tunnel, I trembled with excitement. Handsome young men in crisp white uniforms welcomed us with warm handshakes and dazzling smiles. As we moved through the ship, people wearing bright summer clothes

hustled and bustled all around us. Their merry chatter and laughter rang in my ears. The busy noise subsided as we headed to C deck to check out our cabin. Deep down in the ship, we had a small room. I didn't think I'd be spending too much time there. With the two of us in it, we could barely move. It was cozy, really cozy. I had to sit up on the bunk to let Mom arrange our bags.

Mom unpacked our bags, relaxing and smiling. She gave me a paper to study that listed the ship's activities for the day. It said that a new activity list, along with a menu for the following day, would be put under our door every evening. Mom was still merrily sorting out our clothes when we heard the muffled boom of a ship's whistle. We both stopped what we were doing. A voice came over a speaker in the hallway, telling all visitors to leave.

I leapt off the top bunk, knocking Mom into the tiny bathroom. "We're taking off," I cried. "We're leaving now!"

Mom laughed, even though she must have thought I was half crazy. She told me to go on ahead of her. I bounded from the cabin to join the other passengers on the Promenade deck. As I raced up the stairs, the smell of fish and salt sea air grew stronger. I ran outside, blinking hard in the sudden glare of sunlight. Running and bumping into people, I made a path to an empty spot at the rail. I leaned over, waving happily to the people on the dock.

Deck stewards walked through the crowds, passing around rolls of colored streamers. I watched people snap off a streamer from the roll. Then laughing and shouting, they tossed it out. Streamers blazed in every direction. People at the rails, holding onto one end of the streamer, threw theirs over to the dock where people caught the other end. Fascinated, I started to do the same thing.

The stewards continued to give us streamers until only little bits and pieces of people could be seen through the sea of rainbow

colors. A small boy jumped up and down beside me, tugging his mom's skirt. She bent down and gave him the ends of her streamers. With a serious face, he clutched them in one hand and put his other hand in his mom's. I smiled to myself.

A thunderous blast drowned out our shouting. People stood still. Two more blasts thundered over us. We waited quietly, then the ship moved, and everyone chattered excitedly. The dock seemed to move slowly away as the water widened below us. The bright streamers, held from ship to shore, grew taut. A sudden tug on my streamers nearly yanked the ends from hand. I tightened my grip against the force. Everyone grew tense. I looked down at the little boy. His face quivered and I thought I could see a tear glisten on his cheek. Turning my head, I watched the receding pier. I stood still, pulling back hard on my streamers. For a second, all the noise around me grew faint. With extra strength I jerked the streamers, and felt them snap. Sounds of people shouting came back to me. Dancing and laughing, I threw the broken ends of my streamers into the harbor.

I sat up in my chair. The night had turned cold. I shivered under the blanket and lifted it off slowly. Walking over to where the couple had stood earlier, I watched the light of the moon shimmer across the vast, black ocean. Sounds of the ship slicing through the water reached deep inside of me. I sighed happily. Thinking about the movie I would see tomorrow, I hurried along the deck. It was time to go below, to the little cabin with Mom. I wanted to be sure that she went to sleep without worrying about me.

Paul Marion**Invasion of Grenada****25 October 1983**

A Marine jet whines,
 its slant chalk scratch
 on an otherwise flawless ceiling.
 Even L.A.'s smog blown off
 by night desert winds.
 Scruffy palms, roasting,
 outnumber the faithful at Capo Beach
 this bright autumn noon.
 One bather treads,
 light in the heave and slide,
 just beyond the break.
 Hissing foam sucks back through the stones.

Paul Marion**Human Construction**

drill rod split rock riprap
 hen feed pancake new lamb
 up north big barn dry run
 maple creme common cracker fig jam
 green pool boom derrick quarry sign
 red-hot steel chisel bang-bang
 Grade A first cut sandblast
 Barre Gray Blue Pearl black granite
 fresh bread stoneworker milkshed
 flame-finish rough-sawn low-tech
 handmade seats gas-fired forge hard edge
 blueberry machine tool spring meadow
 waste rock public art thin ice
 pneumatic hammer medium amber cheddar cheese
 mudguard wire saw rosemary
 cutting shed wet field mink farm
 blacksmith sledge head fine point
 chiaroscuro cider jelly studio
 four-wheel profit margin long line
 sugar house warm sun Vermont

*Paula Haines***Hope****I**

What if hope is
A regenerative organ
That grows back like
Half a worm's body?

Well, that only grows back
Because there's nothing
Of any importance there
In the first place.

II

This is impossible.
Hope or hate,
The stupid chicken
And the fucking egg,
One turns into the other,
Who cares which came first?
The more important
Question at hand
Appears to be how
Can the hope be
Extinguished so I
Can see if I want
To live without it?

*Paula Haines***The Puzzle**

You gathered up all the pieces with straight edges and put them
in one pile.

Then the ones with words went in another.

Yet another for ones that are mostly blue.

(these are sky or water)

What you should have made the first step was to read the box.

The warning was right there: for ages 3 and up.

Made of 1,000 pieces, guaranteed to confuse.

(hours of fun)

Overall, the biggest mistake was to let anyone else try to help.

It always works out that they're holding the
exact one you're looking for, or their elbow's on it.

(plus, the race is on)

Even if the tiny portion you choose to stash away is insignificant,
the picture doesn't look right without it there,

And what feels better than that one jig going in?

(even if it's not your puzzle).

Lynne Gagnon

Clean and Right and White

The bus is quiet. I ride to school with these kids every day, but today no one talks. Even the bullies. Hard to believe Tommy Johnson ever held anyone in a headlock till they damn near fainted. Not now.

It's early. The sunlight is still orange. Out of Middleton into Scarborough, and it's still forty-five minutes to where none of us want to be.

I know we're there three blocks before. I hear them chanting. I don't know what they're saying and I don't listen close enough to find out.

The bus stops in front of the school but no one stands to get up. I look out the window once, only once. A sign shoots in front of my window, in my face. "Go Home Niggers."

Two cops come onto the bus. They have to escort us off and into the school. I walk through the double doors and see a long desk with "Central Junior High Students Must Check in Here" printed in red across the front. Usually when I introduce myself, I tell people I was named after Dennis Johnson of the Celtics. I really wasn't but this isn't the time. I walk to the desk and just say to the yellow haired woman "Dennis Tucker."

She tells me 112. What's 112? I don't know, but I should remember it.

I go stand with my friends. A cop asks us for our numbers and leads the group down a hallway. The school is nicer than ours. Every other set of lockers is painted a different color; red,

orange, yellow, green. I can still smell the paint. Ours were all gray. The cop points us into rooms one by one. I see 112 on the door and know it's mine. Me and Frankie White are pointed inside. I head for the first seat I see, and as I walk down the aisle, a couple of kids stare at me. Not the way you usually look at someone till they look at you, and then look away. They just look and look.

I sit next to the window. The sun is shining on me. At first it feels good, it reminds me that there is an outside I will be returning to. Then I get hot. I feel sweat start at my armpits and run down my ribs, down my side, it runs down to my waist and soaks the bottom of my t-shirt.

The teacher is doing some kind of math on the board.

I look down at my desk, at my hands. I start to pick a scab on the back of my wrist. I get my fingernail under a corner and peel. It stings. I wipe the scab on my pants. The cut starts to bleed so I suck it till it stops.

The lunch bell rings. Me and Frankie follow everyone to the cafeteria. We sit at the back end of a table. I don't want to get in the lunch line, so I don't eat. It's pizza day and the smell of the cheese makes me feel sick.

We leave when the bell rings. A bunch of white kids stand at the lockers. "Hey boys, why don't you go back to the ghetto?" They're real tough. They know I can't fight here. Besides, there are two of us and ten of them. Yeah, they're real tough.

The faces stare in the classroom. The few that don't look down try to look me in the eye, but I won't let them. I won't show them my eyes.

I draw a tree in my notebook. Just branches—no leaves. It's a shitty tree. I don't even like to draw.

The bell rings: I can go home now. The same cop is waiting to take us back to the bus. Those crazy white assholes are still out there waving their signs but there aren't as many. Like I wanted

to spend the day with their asshole kids. Like I asked some shithead behind his big desk to send me away, to make me clean and right and white.

My mother waits for me at the kitchen table, from behind a jar of peanut butter and a loaf of bread, the knife on top of the peanut butter like always.

She asks me how it went.

"I'll go back if I have to."

She tells me she's proud, that I can tell my kids.

It's all talk.

I go to my room. Michael Jordan sinks a basket on my wall. Goddamned Michael Jordan. Man can he jump.

Jerri Ridge

The Real Writers

I never believed that writers were real. Perhaps because many of the authors I read—Twain, O'Henry, Dickens—weren't real. They were legendary. Perhaps because the books themselves were real, and the thought of them being written in longhand at someone's kitchen table, in between cups of coffee, phone calls, and peanut butter sandwiches, was nonsensical. Perhaps because, when I studied the photos on book jackets, the figures were as remote to me as royalty. I was sure if I ever met one, I'd fail to curtsy or bow.

Dr. Erouth was the first real writer I ever met. I took his 8:00 a.m. Yeats and Eliot class in the winter term of my senior year at Reading Prep. He was often late, or would leave a message for us to meet him for breakfast at Commons. We would find him in the upstairs faculty dining room, eating scrambled eggs and English muffins, clutching his coffee cup for warmth. His black wool overcoat was cinched at the neck with a very long crimson and white striped school scarf. He wore his coat until well into class, when he would stand suddenly—as though he'd just realized he'd be staying—and unwind the scarf. He folded it carefully over the back of his chair, but threw his coat on the wide windowsill, so its tails were always dusty grey. His hair was scraggly black, falling open at his face the way his coat fell open at his throat. Although we had an unwritten school rule that if an instructor was ten minutes late the class could leave, we waited for Dr. Erouth. He had the same regard for us, and never refused to admit a late student to class. I thought of Dr. Erouth often.

He had a small house on campus all to himself. As our writer-in-residence, I supposed he was due that privilege. His house was near my dorm, so I managed to walk by it twice a day. I wanted him to see me from his window. I wanted him to invite me in, or even ask me to run an errand for him. One of the younger girls in my dorm, Liz, knew him well. He kept a parrot, she said, who swore in French. He was most creative in the afternoon, she said, and had arranged with the school to teach only in the mornings. (I made sure to walk by his house in the afternoons.)

It was rumored that Dr. Erouth bought beer and wine for his favorite students. I doubted it—even writers-in-residence had to acquiesce to school rules, didn't they? But the pyramid of beer cans decorating Liz's room grew taller as the term progressed. And on Wednesday afternoons, when the rest of the school headed to Boston, Dr. Erouth went to Lawrence.

Once, walking back to the dorm behind Liz and her friend Marya, I saw Dr. Erouth pull up beside them in his Jaguar (he told us he bought it in England on a whim, spent his last pound ferrying it across, and had to go without meals during the trip). He had leaned across to speak to Liz, who nodded, laughed and, with Marya, climbed in. Off to Lawrence, I was sure, to sit together on stools at a bar, to share drafts of Guinness (we were reading Yeats) in that close atmosphere. He did wave to me as they went by.

Spring term of my senior year I needed an advisor for my Independent Project—writing a short story, possibly for publication. I stood in the mill of students around Dr. Erouth's desk after class, sweating it out.

Too many seniors have asked him already, I thought. He'll tell me he's too busy—he needs time to write. Or he'll say my interpretation in class is fine, but he sees no creativity in my work. Or he'll make me stand here, with all these people listening, and

outline my story.

"Advise my IP?" I asked hesitantly. He nodded without looking up, and initialed my proposal form.

A few months later I left my finished story in his mailbox. In the lengthy critique he left in mine, he wrote, "you could be a writer...if you really want to be." At first I took this as an unequivocal compliment. Later, I thought it a very kind way of telling me I had a lot to work on. Later still, I wondered if he was implying that the life of a writer was, for many reasons, not necessarily something to aspire to. By this time I had graduated, but I considered writing to ask him if he remembered what he'd written, and what he'd meant. I decided he wouldn't remember. During the summer I received my grades, and from Dr. Erouth this comment: "she had kept counsel totally with herself." Only then did I realize I could have knocked on his door. I could have invited myself in.

Charlene Brusso

Ground Zero Arcade

Ground Zero? Ask anyone in this sprawling junkyard the Boston corporate types call 'Oldtown,' they'll tell you. Oldtowners know me, they know my work. Look for the blossoming mushroom cloud in the front window, the nuclear chrysanthemum with continuous replay. Once a prong hears the name, sees that sign, he usually doesn't forget. I count on it.

Sometimes I sit in the front by the token changers just to listen to the comments from the new prongs. Especially the corps who come slumming. I can always tell a corp, no matter how hard they try to dress down. They have this rigidity; they're edgy, stiff. Their voices are brittle and they laugh too much. No Oldtowners laugh like a corp; they learn early not to give things away.

But prongs are still prongs, and they all stare at my hologram the first time they come in. I have to admit it's impressive. Even no-prongs stop to look, though they can't play. That hologram is my signature: Crazy Janey's mushroom cloud.

Just look at the image — golden fireball billowing out into a bloated red balloon, clawing its way up. And see those lightning flashes cutting through the dustclouds, snapping like shorts in an overloaded circuit as the shock front rolls out from the bloody red-brown stem. Then it jerks and blinks and starts all over again, like a jack-in-the-box. It's just a toy, no more than two cubic meters in volume. Just a toy, a dream, a whimsey from Crazy Janey's freaky imagination.

Most of my clientele can't appreciate the realism. To them it's just another crafty special effect. Sure it's better than the Tri-D

studios can create, but then it's a custom job.

Why did Janey do it? Everyone thinks they know, and no one asks me. Corps are good with assumptions, and Oldtowners don't pry. It's Janey's hologram, freeb. Cantcha see the red neon above the door? Ground Zero Arcade: it's a joke, just a piece of the game. Now you know.

Only I know different. But it IS good for business. And the prongs are here tonight in full force. Some kind of corporate holiday, I heard: CEO's birthday or something. Doesn't matter. What's important is the sound of those tokens dropping into my games, the snarled MIDI synthesis of gunfire and exploding warships twined into the veil of cigarette smoke. Only dead things are quiet, and tonight the arcade is noisy and I'm happy. Well, happy enough.

I watch the players a lot. The best ones are cool. Nothing moves but their eyes, and their fingers on the console. Click, they cable wristplugs into the game, and now it's a fight to the death. They're not flashy, these prongs, but they don't fall. Not many corps play like that. Too noisy. No instinct. The high scores are from the quiet ones, the loners, and those scores are hard to beat.

Most of the high scores here carry my initials. But I don't play often. It draws too much attention. Besides, it gets in the way of the paying customers.

Business is hot tonight, so I'm watching from the sidelines. There're a few unfamiliar faces around— corps on holiday, tasting the forbidden fruit of jacking into a computer for something besides a spreadsheet or a requisition for office supplies. New faces, especially the slumming corps, mean a lot of flash and a lot of dropped tokens.

Orange fire reflects from the silver t-shirts of four sweet young things in copycat Vichenzi originals. They're so fresh they could have stepped out of a ContiCo Cosmetics ad: brown hair worn short and curly, shiny teeth bright white as a magnesium

flare, and faces planed to a uniform smooth fleshpink. Two males, a female, and one who could pass for either, probably some corporate secretarial pool. They've been feeding tokens into that multi-player 'Harem-Scarem' for over an hour. The androgyne is the coolest, but all four are sweating and panting; Harem's interface is pretty realistic.

I don't even like the game much, but somehow it's fitting that I look up from it just as he enters the arcade. Mirrorshades, collar-length silver-blond hair clipped short on the sides, brown leather jacket. Long legs in black denims, fringed black boots. Nothing so unusual there: the description matches half my clientele, the Oldtownner half.

No, it's not how he looks, it's how he moves. Smooth, long strides, hands tucked in his jacket pockets. He's no Oldtownner I've seen before, but he looks more dangerous than your average corp — more aware, and comfortable with it. Like he knows exactly what he wants, and how he's going to get it.

His mirrorshades scan the arcade chaos in narrow arcs: his hidden eyes must be swinging wide, taking in the sights with as professional an eye as me or my partner Trixie ever used. Reflected holograms sweep across the chromed surface of his glasses in garish acid-etched rainbows. He's taken his left hand out of his pocket now. His right is closed in a fist behind the dull distressed leather.

A hit, in my place? Not a smart idea. This boy must be from out of town. But I like his form. I'll give him a warning. If he's ept, he'll take his business elsewhere.

I nod to Trixie where she's leaning against the smoked plexy phone kiosk by the front door. She shakes her head, dreadlocks wound with green and blue yarn bouncing against her chocolate brown cheeks. I scratch the right side of my jaw, pull my right earlobe. She slides upright and strolls after the blond. I've never seen a panther but I'm sure she moves like one, lean,

muscular and coiled to spring. He moves the same way, watching the room with that casual alertness. It's a hit, all right. I wonder who?

Trixie's got a smile growing on her elegant face. I hope this boy is smart. He's too pretty to kill. My one soft spot, that eye for art. Lucky for him.

I walk toward the side wall, angling away to flank him. My slim Messier 9mm is exactly where it's supposed to be, under my right sleeve and ready. All I have to do is crook my thumb and I'm holding the best short-range defense money and contacts can buy.

I pass Sage, doing his regular Wednesday night calisthenics at the controls of 'Raid on Antares.' He smiles, a quick gleam of aluminized eyeteeth, and nods before returning his full attention to the swooping starships. The LCD score panel reads almost 5,000,000. He could even beat my record tonight. The thunder of a synthetic explosion rattles under my feet as a beam of yellowgold plasma shatters a target. Sage's score jumps by 20,000. Yeah, maybe he'll do it.

My boy has stopped by the 'DragonMaster' table, silver hair falling over his forehead. I can see his face-on now, lithe reptilian figures distorted in his mirrorshades as he glances at the gameboard. The reflection drifts as he raises his gaze. His mouth thins briefly, then he smiles. At me.

Cocky bastard. I push my hair out of my eyes and smile back, and he takes his hand out of his pocket. He's holding something matte black and snub-nosed. It's pointed at me. Fast, I drop behind the Antares box, cock my thumb. The Messier slides into my palm. You'd better be wearing some Kevlar under that leather, Blondie.

I fire, he fires. The Messier's action is smooth, no recoil. All around me people are getting intimate with the floor. Sage, down flat at the opposite end of the console, scowls at me. Above

us his interrupted game blinks as the timer counts down. This is bad for business.

The blond dodges; I can see him cleanly in the mylar-mirrored ceiling panels. He cuts left and I crouch-run-drive to the 'High Polaris' imager. I catch sight of Trixie's dreadlock yarns as she drifts along the wall. The black lightshield around the Polaris display shatters with a crack. Shards of broken plastic rain down and I duck, hands protecting my head. His next bullet ricochetes, singing off metal, and takes out a ceiling panel overhead. Cursing, I duck under the game in a fog of crumbling acoustic tile.

A quiet second, then the pneumatic alarm of Trixie's needlegun. More breaking plastic and a thick grunt. Reflected in a flimsy shiver of hanging mylar, Blondie slumps onto the 'Dark Continuum' console, slides to the floor. His gun falls from his hand.

"Got him." Trixie's satisfaction is clear enough above the background chatter of the game.

I stand, brushing debris off my good black silk tunic. The cosmetic quadruplets are gone in a hectic wash of reflected neon. The others I marked for corps are leaving, too, faces white and shaken. Go back to your nice safe suburbs. Take a tab of bluedream to feel better, a few sleepies to finish the night. Then tomorrow you can tell how you came this close to getting blown away in Oldtown. You'll stay away for a few days, maybe a week, but you'll be back. You're sure it can't happen to you.

Sage has picked up his game in time. He locks into it smoothly, hands spidered across the controls. His bluegrey eyes dart after the synthesized images. He smiles and blows away another enemy ship with a gold thunderflash.

Trixie's kneeling by the body, her long fingernails touching his throat. Silver nails like blades hover over his carotid.

"OK?" I lean down, hair falling over my shoulders, and

pick up his gun.

"Looks good, Boss." She catches his jaw to turn his face to the side.

"Real clean, if I do say so myself." A steel sliver glints under his ear; she extracts it with her fingernails, leaving a bead of blood on his neck. "Office?"

"Yeah." I nod. "I'll be up in a minute."

I assess the damage I'll have to fix tomorrow. The games natter to themselves, playing their demo screens with autistic single-mindedness. Only the prongs like Sage are still here, equally immune to distraction. Nobody knew Blondie, nobody wants to know him. Life goes on.

~~~~~

In my office Trixie's dumped the body on the unsprung couch under the window that overlooks the arcade. The blinds are closed and the desk lamp beams at full. Light falls across his face with stark drama, a 2D still in retro-cinematic monochrome. Without the mirrorshades he looks familiar — something in the shape of his eyes, his mouth. Then I notice the clover-shaped emerald in his left earlobe.

"You know him, Janey?" Trixie finishes duct-taping his wrists and sits back on her boot heels.

"Maybe." I hope not. "How many needles did he get?"

"Just four; he'll be out half an hour, a little longer."

I slide my hip over the edge of the desk and sit. I can feel Trixie watching me watch him. Wondering. "Go back down, Trix, I'll call if I need you."

"Sure," she says. She's used to humoring me. She opens the door and the bright roar of the arcade rolls in. Prickling quiet swirls down as the door swings shut.

I sit there with one hand in a tight fist pressed against my mouth. Light picks out highlights in the emerald in his ear. He



has to be related to Lucky, with those looks. Lucky's hair was darker, redder, but the face is similar. Five years now, since Lucky died. I guess my grace period has expired. They've found me.

Trixie's done a good job with the duct-tape; he won't be getting out of here before I'm done with him. I step into my executive washroom, a closet fitted with a rust-stained sink and a john with a cracked tanklid. I look in the mirror and tell myself it's okay. I'm no paler than usual. But I have to grip the edge of the sink to make my hands stop trembling.

I splash cold water on my face. The chlorine smell is strong tonight; purifier must need a new filter. Then I settle back behind my desk. Lucky had a brother, didn't he? A kid brother, yeah, cute blond, name of Ryan. Why'd it take me so long to recognize him? I'm off, that's why. Losing the edge. Getting soft, Balzac would say; getting old.

Almost getting dead.

Ryan lays like a figure carved on one of those old stone coffins. Fine gold lashes fringe his quiet eyelids. A facet on his earring winks with the slow rhythm of his breathing. I could make this real easy. I could just kill him now. Never let him open those eyes again. Goddamn right, it's what he wanted to do to me. I should just do it.

No. Not yet.

~~~~~

I always thought you were a bit of a fool, Lucky. Not stupid, more like a jester or a team mascot. Even now I could fill a hard disk with all the times you nearly pushed Colonel Balzac over the limit.

I thought you were just wired that way, born to tread the edge. Like you needed the adrenalin to live. I see people a lot like that in Oldtown — in Oldtowns all over the world. People half-

crazy from drugs and heavy pasts, old crimes committed, old loves lost. Real romantic, the streetpoets try to tell you. It's easy to believe that shit when you're young. Easy to do a lot of things, then, things that are hard to get out of, later. Like working for Balzac.

It was after the Beirut job. We were in London, sitting in the murk of Gordon's pub, drinking bitters. Balzac had upgraded the battlecomputer again, and the new sockets made my wrists ache.

"I'm sick of it, Lucky," I said. "I want out."

"Baby, you need a vacation," you told me. "No Balzac, no simulations, no karate or guns. Throw some clothes in a bag and we'll go, just you and me."

I needed the time off. And I wanted you. So we went.

It was early summer in Sydney. We rented a house on the beach, miles from anyone and anything. A beautiful house, full of skylights and pale wood and plants. The bedroom had sliding glass doors that opened onto a wooden deck, with stairs treading down from the deck to the sand.

Every morning you got up to run on the beach. Sometimes I went with you, but usually I swam or windsurfed. The water was warm and buoyant; when I got tired I could just float and watch you.

The peace was strange. As though time and space had refolded and this world wasn't really mine. It couldn't last; I knew it couldn't, it was too fine.

The last morning I woke before dawn. You were close beside me, your arm on my wrist and your long legs tangled with mine. The sun was coming up. I could see the pale line widening on the horizon between night and the water's edge. The white sand glowed pink and healthy. You smelled like a garden from the Arabian nights, all musk and dark spice, and your hand was warm on my stomach.

I pulled away carefully, so you wouldn't wake. And I went to the sliding glass doors that looked out over the ocean, laid my palms, my forehead against the silky cool glass.

I tried to memorize every instant of that sunrise: the colors, the invisible heat; to measure its progress by the arc of my shadow sweeping over you like a sundial gnomon. But it was too quick. I couldn't record all the input my senses received.

My eyes stung and I blinked. You slept on your side, reaching into the empty space where I had lain, your sunbrowned arm like mahogany against the pale sheets. The perfection was instantaneous, impossible to save: you, asleep and inviting; the sun, newborn in fire and water and gold.

To hell with it, I said. To hell with time, and entropy, and dissipation. I never could just give up. A touch, a tentative hand on your shoulder, and your blue eyes opened, and the doubts were seared away. Even now the memory still burns. Spiders spinning in the same corner, that's what we were. Tangled in each other's webs, as long as it was convenient for the both of us.

At the end of the day we sat on the deck drinking Australian Chardonnay — I remember the koala on the label. You held the bottle up to the fading orange-red light, squinting.

"Empty," you said. "I'll get us another." And you kissed me and went inside. When you came back, you had a gun.

"Sorry, babe," you told me. "Balzac's orders."

I put down my empty glass and stood slowly. I looked at the gun. Then I looked at you.

"You bastard."

"Janey, don't make this difficult." Your blue eyes were so sincere I had to laugh.

"I sure as hell don't want it to be easy!"

You shrugged. That's when I kicked you. High, in the jaw; Mantis Springs and Strikes. I was barefoot; the joint in my big toe cracked. Your head snapped up, the gun flipped away.

You tumbled backwards into the glass doors, arms thrown wide. Then panes snapped and pieces flew everywhere, shards red with your blood and the dying sun. Glass ground under your back, and you slid to a stop at the foot of the bed, leaving a red streak on the polished wood floor. Your head was on your shoulder, crooked-necked, like a broken training dummy. Glass lay around you like scattered diamonds.

I was right, Lucky. You weren't stupid, but you were a fool.

~~~~~

"Problems, Boss?" Trixie eyes me when I come back downstairs, her hand straying near the slim holster under her left arm.

"Not at all, Trix. Looks like business has tapered off for the night."

She nods. "Grave quiet, except for Sage over there."

I can hear the fanfare as Antares clears its RAM and brings up the fiftieth frame. Only fifty? Then he hasn't beaten me yet.

The fingers of his left hand blur, explosions ring in the air. He leans forward, right index finger poised. I can see the frame in my mind, the battlecruiser with her screening swarm of drones. The trick is to wait until the drones shift to avoid the mothership's main canon. When it happens, you fire right down her laser turret, before she can fire at you —

"Shit!" Sage curses, and scarlet light washes over his face and hands. He pounds the machine with his fists, interface cables slapping the darkblue plastic. "Goddammit! Goddamn fucking machine!"

I grin at Trixie. "I guess my record's safe."

The machine plays out the last bars of its theme and goes into demo mode. Sage yanks the cables out of his wrist sockets,



leaving them dangling from the locked console like a disconnected life support.

"Hey, Sage, better luck next time, man."

He mutters, waving my words away, and stalks out. I tell Trixie I'll close up.

"What about him?" She points to the ceiling with her thumb.

"I'll take care of it; don't worry."

She looks at me with her head tilted to the left, her right eyebrow raised. "Sure." Then she straightens, dreadlocks swaying, and slaps me on the shoulder. "You take care, Janey. Be lucky."

I can feel the corner of my mouth curl wryly. "I'll try, honey. You can be sure of that."

~~~~~

The emerald shamrock glints and Ryan's eyelids flutter. My watch tells me it's been nearly forty minutes.

"Wake up." I slap him harder than I wanted to, and my hand stings and burns. Ryan's head rolls with the blow, toward the light, and he opens his eyes.

Blue. Lucky's eyes.

Wide and glassy from the knockout dart, his pupils are slow to react. He shuts his eyes, grinding the lids down tight. He turns his head left a few degrees, then right, as though he's testing the link to the rest of his body.

"Checkout time, lover." I take my Swiss Army knife out of my pocket and pry open the biggest blade. Ryan's body goes rigid; he wrenches and twists his hands against the duct tape bonds. I grab hold of his wrists and squeeze.

"Hold still." When I raise the knife, the blade flashes, reflecting a slim ruler of light across his throat, over his face. He

squints and blinks. His eyes are on me, not the blade.

I slice through the heavy silver-grey tape. He stares, lips parted, his breath hissing in his throat.

"Your brother was a fool, Ryan." I snap the blade shut. "Don't be like him."

Ryan sits up with a jerk, winces as he strips off the tape. I lean back on my desk; the steel sockets in my wrists gleam briefly as I fold my arms. My shadow falls over him. He blinks and licks dry lips. I can see his eyes moving over my face, searching. But with the light behind me, I know he won't find anything.

"Are you goin' to kill me or not?" His voice is deep and musical, with the Irish lift that Lucky taught himself to hide. He shifts on the couch, rubbing his palms on his thighs. I can smell his fear over the bitter tang in the back of my throat.

"You're already dead, I don't need to kill you. But Balzac will, if you tell him you're not."

His hands lay still on his thighs. His eyes narrow, recognizing the truth. "What d'you want, then?"

"You ever play 'Hide and Seek,' Blue-eyes? It's a game." I smile. "I'm very good at games."

~~~~~

It's chilly outside, brisk, with a gusting wind that smells like rain. And dark. Not many streetlamps work in Oldtown. The street is quiet, empty of everything but shadows; lightning never strikes twice in the same place, they say, and this place has already had its action for the night. So much for old cliches.

If I were still working for Balzac, this would be too easy. I'd have a case full of shaped charges with strips of contact adhesive. A transmitter would let me detonate them from a mile away. Then I wouldn't have to watch.

Standing down the block from my arcade I can see the



orange-gold glare of the hologram in the front window. The red neon sign above the door blinks on and off as the toy nuke flickers and replays. Old three-story building — this will be easy.

Beside me Ryan turns up the collar of his leather jacket. His face is ghostly pale, his voice soft and tense.

"You're sure this'll work?"

Humorous question. I laugh. "Just watch." The mushroom cloud in the window cycles through one more time, the fiftieth since I set the charges. Now —

A white flash backlights the hologram, washing it out and filling the windows on the first floor. The hollow thump of the main charge shocks out, rolling by underfoot like a live thing tunneling. The building collapses on itself, bricks leaning inward, then toppling with a waterfall's steady roar.

Ryan holds his hands over his ears. A silver-white beam stabs up past the second and third floor windows, up through the open roof, like a xenon search light, full of dust and mortar particulates. The light yellows, dims into flickering orange, and I hear faint popping noises.

"The plasma displays are exploding!" I shout to Ryan over the thunder. "That blue and green in the flames, that's from the gases in the tubes. Pretty, huh?"

A gout of fire claws its way up into the night, casting shadows like full sunlight. It spreads, swelling into the familiar capped shape: my signature. Beautiful.

"Come on!" Ryan grabs my arm. "We've seen it before."

~~~~~

Two first class seats on the Tokyo High Altitude Shuttle. Soft koto jazz, the newest wave, is plinking obbligate to the toast.

"To new business ventures." Ryan smiles, touching the rim of his champagne flute to mine. I grin back, showing all my

teeth, like a shark.

"To games," I say, and we drink, eyeing each other over the enamel platter of pale sushi and green wasabi.

Contributors

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